
LESSON 1

CLASSICAL THEORISTS (I): SUN TZU

The best policy is to attack the enemy's plans; the next best [is] to disrupt his alliances, for to subdue the enemy's army without fighting is the acme of skill.

--Sun Tzu

Introduction

Purpose

This lesson

- Introduces you to the ideas and concepts on war of the ancient Chinese writer Sun Tzu
 - Helps you understand the nature of war and familiarizes you with strategies and tactics for fighting in different environments and situations
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Why Study Sun Tzu?

- Sun Tzu's advice is timeless; it has influenced both Eastern and Western military leaders for many years. His influence within the Marine Corps has been significant. In point of fact, though FMFM 1: *Warfighting* (revised in 1997 to become MCDP 1) is primarily a Clausewitzian document, it is spiced throughout with ideas from Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*.
 - Sun Tzu has influenced modern military theorists and commanders, particularly those from non-Western societies. Given our global perspective and military obligations, a view of war and conflict from another cultural perspective is very relevant and pertinent.
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Introduction, Continued

Sun Tzu and You: Your Task	<p>As a Marine Corps officer, your study of Sun Tzu should enable you to understand his analysis of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• War• Strategy• Military-civil relations• Other factors associated with the profession of arms <p>You should also compare and contrast Sun Tzu's theories with other theorists' ideas about the nature of war and strategies of waging war.</p>
Relationship To Other Instruction	<p>This lesson provides an introduction to early Eastern military thought and a foundation for further study on the development of both Eastern and Western military thought. It also provides a framework for analyzing revolutionary warfare in lesson 12. Further, the relationship between a nation's military, its political life, and its policies--an important component of Sun Tzu's writings—will be explored in <i>Strategic Level of War</i> (8802) and <i>Operational Level of War</i> (8803).</p>
Study Time	<p>This lesson, including the issues for consideration, will require about 4.5 hours of study.</p>

Educational Objectives

Historical Context	Understand Sun Tzu in his historical context. [JPME Area 3d]
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Basic Theories	Understand Sun Tzu's basic theories and his approach to warfighting. [JPME Area 3b]
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JPME Areas/ Objectives/Hours (accounting data)	3/b/2.5 3/d/0.5
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Historical Background

Origin of Sun Tzu's *Art of War*

- It is believed that Sun Tzu lived in China between 400 to 300 B.C. and that he authored *The Art of War*. However, the issue of his existence has never been resolved completely.
 - Regardless of whether Sun Tzu was a real person or just a collective pen name for the compiled writings of many authors, the essays make up one of the earliest known treatises on the theory of war.
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Historical Context

Sun Tzu lived during the Warring States Era (453-221 B.C.) of Chinese history. During this tumultuous period, China was comprised of a number of states of varying geographic size, population, and resources. The political landscape of China changed often during this era, as various states sought in turn to dominate their neighbors or as other states established alliances to bring down (or hold at bay) a powerful adversary.

Amalgamation and Consolidation

Although the military advantage could often shift from one of the major states to another, at least one clear trend is evident: The growth of large states at the expense of their smaller and weaker neighbors. Indeed, the process of amalgamation and consolidation--which saw smaller states absorbed (through conquest or intimidation) and consolidated by their larger neighbors--was a constant feature of Chinese historical development and culminated in 221 B.C. in establishing a monolithic state by the first universal emperor.

The Thirteen Chapters

Given that a state's survival often depended on its ability to defend itself from its neighboring states, Chinese rulers soon found that waging wars successfully required a coherent strategic and tactical theory and a practical doctrine governing intelligence, planning, command, operation, and administration. Sun Tzu, the author of *The Thirteen Chapters*, was the first man to provide such a theory and doctrine.

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Historical Background, Continued

Chinese Thinkers During this time, a number of intellectuals produced ideas ranging on the spectrum from the most concrete to the most abstract and from the most practical to the most theoretical. Among the most practical of the early Chinese thinkers were the military experts, one of the best of whom was Sun Wu. He was a legendary general who is believed to be the author of a remarkable text dating from the fourth century B.C. entitled *Ping-fa, The Art of War*.

Discovery of *The Art of War* *The Art of War* has been studied for centuries in the East and has had some degree of influence on current Russian thought. By comparison, although a version of the book was available in France as early as 1772, the West really "discovered" Sun Tzu only in this century.

Sun Tzu's Maxims *The Art of War* is not an organized volume on strategy or tactics. It does not have the organized structure or pointed philosophical approach of Clausewitz's *On War*. It is a loosely organized compendium of sayings, aphorisms "imperatives," and military experiences.

Required Readings

The Art of War Griffith, Samuel B., trans., *The Art Of War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1963. Read only pp. 57 to 149. This is a highly regarded, significant, and insightful work on the subject of war. The volume consists of concise, pithy statements of practical advice on subjects such as the commander and his style of leadership, the importance of psychological elements in war such as deception and surprise, and the use of various "propaganda" sources to gain support from the local populace. Many consider this volume as valuable today as when it originally was written.

When you read Griffith's edition of Sun Tzu's writings, pay close attention to the political and military situations in the Warring States Era (453-221 B.C.).

MCDP 1
Warfighting

- Review the entire publication. Keep in mind that
 - *Warfighting* is at root a Clausewitzian document; the very chapter headings and titles are derived from *On War*.
 - *Warfighting* is very heavily spiced with the ideas of Sun Tzu. Look for Sun Tzu's influence as you review *Warfighting*.
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For Further Study

Supplemental Readings

The readings listed are **not** required. They are provided as recommended sources of additional information about topics in this lesson that may interest you. They will increase your knowledge and augment your understanding of this lesson.

If you are interested in further non-Western approaches to war and a further adaptation of Sun Tzu, see the following:

- Sawyer, Ralph D., trans. *Sun Pin, Military Methods: A Brilliant Elaboration of the Art of War by the Great-grandson of Sun Tzu*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1995.
 - Lau, D. C. and Ames, Roger T., trans. *Sun Pin: The Art of Warfare: A Comprehensive Translation of the Fourth-Century B.C. Chinese Military Philosopher and Strategist*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1996.
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Issues for Consideration

Key Ideas What are Sun Tzu's key ideas? Remember, for any theorist, historical context is important. Could his ideas and commentary have evolved because conditions in China were violent and wars and conflicts numerous and costly?

War and Politics Sun Tzu felt war was a grave matter since it concerned survival of the state. Hence, it deserved serious study. Going to war, mobilizing an army, and committing it to battle should be done only for the most serious of causes. Careful analysis and planning are necessary before beginning a campaign. What did Sun Tzu feel was the relationship between war and politics and between political and military objectives?

Bloodless Battles

- Consider Sun Tzu's arguments about winning "bloodless battles." What does he have to say about using clever strategies? How about exercising patient, long-term strategies? Are they superficially attractive? What problems do they raise?
- Does his term *bloodless battle* really mean war in the sense westerners use the term *war*, or is his bloodless battle merely a course of political machinations short of war?

Sun Tzu Today

- Is a modern democracy capable of Sun Tzu's patient schemes?
- Can open societies with complex military organizations, a free media, and conflicting political institutions really execute such clever stratagems?
- What happens when a nation confronts a foe whose military policies and actions are rooted in these very concepts?
